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E.O. 12958; NA

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SUBJECT: OFDA REP VISIT TO BARAKA AND FIZI

Summary

1. (U) OFDA Rep Victor Bushamuka visited Baraka and Fizi, South Kivu province from May 18 to 20 to evaluate the security and humanitarian situations in that part of South Kivu Province. The area was found to be highly militarized, the situation still remains somewhat tense, and the population still fears a renewal of hostilities. Authorities estimate that only 30% of the Fizi pre-war population, and 60% of Baraka population, have yet returned. For logistic and security reasons, UNHCR does not plan to assist in the return of refugees to this area until 2005. END SUMMARY.

Military Control and Security between Uvira and Baraka

2. (U) Traveling from Uvira to Baraka on May 18, OFDA Rep Victor Bushamuka observed many heavily armed troops deployed along the road, and felt that the general climate was more of continuing hostilities rather than peace. Ex-RCD/G army and Mai-Mai forces control different villages along this road. The villages on the Uvira-Lweba stretch, about 60 km long, are generally under Mai-Mai control. However, within this area, key villages having road access to the high plateau are all controlled by ex-RCD soldiers. The remaining section of the road, running about 30km from Lweba to Baraka, is exclusively under the control of ex-RCD troops. When OFDA Rep traveled, there were multiple check points along the road where "taxes" were extorted from commercial vehicle operators and bicycle traders. Although, well-marked humanitarian vehicles are not taxed, humanitarians are nevertheless obliged to stop at these check points. It was claimed by some of OFDA Rep's fellow travelers that though they constituted harassment of civilians by military, the establishment of these revenue-collection posts had actually resulted in a reduction in the soldiers' supplying themselves via other means such as pillaging and hostage-ransom schemes.

Baraka and Fizi under separate control

3. (U) Before the war, Baraka was under Fizi's administrative authority. However, during the war, Baraka and Fizi came to be controlled by different factions, which led to the establishment of two administrations-an RCD/G-appointed one in Baraka and a Kinshasa-appointed one in Fizi. These continue to the present day, with Mutambala Bridge, situated at about 10 km south of Baraka, separating the RCD-controlled Baraka area from the Mai-Mai controlled Fizi area. (Note: The first village after Mutambala Bridge also used to be the main resistance base of the Burundian rebel group FDD (Front de Defense de la Democratie), which has now left that area. The Mai-Mai is well implanted in Fizi, and is known to be fiercely opposed to any Rwandan presence/influence in eastern DRC,

including all RCD/G elements.

14. (U) Though the FARDC hierarchy has reportedly sent a commander to unify the military in Baraka and Fizi, military administration remains as separate as the civil administration. The forces on the ground continue to take orders from the same leaders they did during the war and remain extremely distrustful of one another. All vehicles traveling from Baraka to Fizi, including those of humanitarians, are thoroughly searched before being allowed to enter Mai-Mai areas. The Territorial Administrator of Fizi even prevented his people from collecting seeds and tools offered by the USAID/OFDA partner Action Against Hunger (AAH)-USA last season simply because the distribution was being conducted from an RCD/G-controlled area and was therefore to be considered suspect. Thus not only does the situation present a security concern, but also further complicates the implementation of humanitarian activities in the territory.
15. (U) There are no check points in Fizi, except at the entrance of the town. However, anywhere in Mai-Mai territory, vehicles can be stopped and searched by soldiers at any moment. In Fizi, where the system of military taxing vehicles does not yet exist, the inhabitants indicated that they often have to share their meager food supplies with soldiers.
16. (U) Control of Fizi Territory itself is divided between two major warlords. Mai-Mai chief Dunia controls Fizi town and the peninsula of Ubwari, while Colonel Masunzu, a Congolese Tutsi commanding some strongly anti-Rwanda Banyamulenge forces, reigns over the high plateau area from his headquarters in the village of Minembwe. Any movement activity in either of these areas must first be approved by these commanders.
17. (U) Humanitarian actors with whom OFDA Rep spoke felt that the establishment of the transitional government in Kinshasa had indeed resulted in somewhat improved security for the populations of Baraka and Fizi, but noted that the continued presence of so many armed groups responding to different control hierarchies nevertheless leaves the area very susceptible to renewed conflict.

IDPs and Refugees

18. (U) On the road from Uvira to Baraka, the OFDA Rep saw many empty houses and many fully or partially destroyed villages. There were, however, also many houses under construction, suggesting that people are indeed gradually returning to the area. According to the administrator of Baraka, about 60% of the population has returned.
19. (U) The situation on the Baraka-Fizi axis was very different. Here almost all the villages were completely destroyed and they remain covered with tall grass. The road itself is overgrown by grass and bush. Only a few recent returnees were observed trying to clear the grass around the remains of their houses. In Fizi, the administrator estimated that the territory has regained only about 30% of its population of the pre-war period.
10. (U) According to the UNHCR estimates, about 150,000 of the refugees who are in camps in Tanzania are from the territory of Fizi, with 100,000 of these believed to be from Fizi and the remaining 50,000 from the villages on the axis from Makobola to Baraka. Recent returnees reported that food rations were being reduced in the camps, leading more refugees to consider a return to DRC. Many refugees have reportedly stated, however, that they would prefer to wait until July or August to make the move, so as to permit their children to complete the school year in Tanzania. The recent security problems in Bukavu and Kamanyola may, of course, make refugees less willing to return to DRC than they were a month ago.
11. (U) A joint UN humanitarian mission was recently conducted in Baraka and Fizi to evaluate the possibility of UNHCR assisting refugees returning to Fizi and Baraka from Tanzania. It was concluded

that while Baraka is relatively stable, Fizi is still highly insecure and that security issues would need to be addressed before serious humanitarian intervention could be undertaken. In addition, UNHCR will not be able to make full use of the port of Baraka unless it undergoes serious renovation nor deliver supplies to Fizi until the Baraka-Fizi road, and most particularly Mutambala Bridge, is repaired. UNHCR is thus currently not planning to assist refugees to return until 2005.

12. (U) Fizi residents felt that most people who had taken refuge in the forest during the war, rather than fleeing to Tanzania, have already returned. While visiting returnee families, it was OFDA Rep's impression that many of those who had come from the forest were in relatively poor health and manifesting clear signs of malnutrition, whereas those that had been in refugee camps in Tanzania seemed considerably better off.

Humanitarian Assistance in Baraka-Fizi

13. (U) Though humanitarians have become more active in Fizi Territory over the past year, most activities have, until recently, been concentrated only in and around Baraka. AAH-USA has been implementing an OFDA funded food security program in which seeds, tools, and fishing equipment have been distributed to IDPs and returnees. With ECHO funding, AAH-USA also runs a nutrition program with several feeding centers located on the Uvira-Baraka axis. Also in Baraka, Aide Medicale Internationale(AMI) and MSF-Spain have been providing basic health care assistance to IDPs and returnees.

14. (U) Due to insecurity and logistic constraints, Fizi was inaccessible to humanitarian activities until December 2003. AAH has started, under the OFDA-funded food security project, assisting the population of Fizi with the rehabilitation of fish ponds. Seeds and tools distribution for IDPs and returnees of Fizi is planned for September 2004. AMI had its first distribution of medicines to selected health clinics in Fizi in May, 2004. In addition, AMI is currently looking for funds to rehabilitate some key village clinics in rural Fizi that were destroyed during the war. The MSF-Spain staff in Baraka indicated to OFDA Rep that they are not yet active in Fizi, but plan to provide basic assistance to the Fizi main hospital later this year. HOOKS.